

Chapter 1 Introduction

By
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In 1995, a group of concerned citizens in Beaufort County, now called the “Clean Water Task Force” (CWTF), became alarmed about the increasing closure of estuarine water to shellfish harvesting in their County. This concern led to a meeting with then Governor David Beasley and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) Commissioner, Mr. Doug Bryant, who endorsed the CWTF efforts and agreed to work with that group to address their concerns (CWTF, 1997).

The CWTF convened several meetings in 1996 which brought together concerned citizens, agency staff, and technical experts to discuss and evaluate concerns related to urban development and other land use practices, the effects of point and non-point source runoff into coastal wetlands, boating impacts, methods to control storm water discharges into coastal waters, and programs being conducted by SCDHEC and other agencies to monitor and assess water quality in South Carolina. The CWTF then prepared a final report entitled, *A Blueprint for Clean Water. Strategies to Protect and Restore Beaufort County’s Waterways* (CWTF, 1997). This report listed ten major steps and other recommendations that the County and its municipalities should undertake to improve Beaufort County water bodies, with assistance from appropriate state and other government agencies.

One major recommendation was for Beaufort County and the Town of Hilton Head Island to contribute to the performance of a baseline assessment of Broad Creek and the Okatee River. The Broad Creek watershed has extensive urban and suburban development that drains into a relatively small water body. The Okatee River is a comparably sized and relatively undeveloped watershed, but existing and planned developments may significantly alter the character of this water body in the future. The recommended study would be conducted by SCDHEC, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Charleston Laboratory, which is now part of NOAA’s National Ocean Service (NOS).

A scope of work was submitted and approved by the County and the CWTF in 1996. The study was initiated during the summer of 1997 through joint funding provided by the Beaufort County Council and SCDHEC. The study design involved a comprehensive sampling effort to assess water quality, sediment quality, and biological condition in both Broad Creek and the Okatee River using identical sampling protocols. The primary objective of this study was to provide a better understanding of existing conditions in different habitats of each drainage system using an unbiased sampling design. The study was not designed to target specific activities, such as evaluating the effects of marinas, boating activities, urban runoff, etc. Rather, it was designed to

evaluate the integrated effects of all activities that may affect the quality of these water bodies. Details of the study design and findings are provided in the following chapters.